

## ETHNICITY IN MODERN EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY\*

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In a recent article Bromley and Shkaratan,<sup>1</sup> prominent Soviet scholars, stated that "Most Soviet ethnographers are agreed that their science deals with ethnic entities." Furthermore, they state that in their opinion, "the core of ethnography's field of study consists in a study of the stable and characteristic features of ethnic traits whose sum give ethnic groups their inimitable character." They then continue with describing ethnic entities in terms of subsequent stages of social evolution in which ethnic features manifest themselves in variable form and intensity according to socioeconomic needs. They assume that ethnic processes are slower than socioeconomic change, therefore they can be discerned by direct observation of the everyday life of a contemporary folk, so that "research into the cultural features of ethnic entities has become the gist of the ethnographic approach to the present."

Prior to Bromley's conceptions of the study of ethnics, presented in his book and also in a paper written for the International Ethnological Congress held in Chicago last September,<sup>2</sup> the Soviet school of ethnography established its ideology and methodology in the service of national politics following the October Revolution. In the newly-formed Union ethnographers began to study and describe the multitudinous ethnic cultures with their quite diverse ethnic traditions, historic heritages, living conditions and socioeconomic systems. Approximately thirty million of the population lived then in tribal, semi-feudal, agricultural or patriarchal, nomadic-pastoral systems, and the government had to face the problem of fitting them into a modern industrial state. As S.P. Tolstov expressed it,<sup>3</sup> it was the duty of scholars to explore the origin and historic development of these ethnics to allow them to replace their obscure oral traditions, origin legends and myths, with factual folk histories. Since many of the nationalities had no written history--they had no written literature at all--it became the task of the ethnographers to revive the forgotten epochs of their history. Scholarly research was hence determined by the need to help underdeveloped minorities in accordance with Lenin's minority policy,<sup>4</sup> to help peoples make the leap from tribal conditions into the Industrial Age overnight. As Tolstov stated, "The ethnohistoric monograph, the description of the origins and history of peoples, became gradually the basic type of scholarly study." Two years later, S.A. Tokarev<sup>5</sup> discussed the problem of "ethnogenesis-research" as one of the most crucial and difficult fields, and emphasized that the task is so complex, it is necessary to engage the help of physical anthropologists, archaeologists, and linguists in the research. However, the team had to be directed by an

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ethnologist, whose concerns with specific ethnic traits enable him to coordinate the field data of all related disciplines. "A folk can be the carrier of a great number of cultural traits shaped by historic, geographic facts and living conditions, that earmark a whole complex of material and spiritual culture." The Soviet school of ethnography also raised the question of ethnic boundaries,<sup>6</sup> which is viewed today as one of the most crucial foci of investigations attempting a definition of the specific characteristics of neighboring groups through comparative research.

Ethnicity, ethnic and national minority groups are very much in the center of concern today in all nations of the world.<sup>7</sup> They are the concern of developing modern nations that have to fit diverse ethnic cultures into their framework in order to establish themselves and to survive. They are the concern of long-established nations, large and small, with population groups that have adhered to different cultural values over an extended period of time and whose power-struggles flare up from time to time. It is the concern of the New World nations to cope with the identity-retention desire and the accommodation of immigrant groups that make up their populations. All this appears primarily as a political problem of the power structure and as an educational and socio-psychological problem of the membership of ethnic groups. The migration of peoples is a continuous and important part of human history that is responsible for the distribution of ethnics in the world today. Population movements create nations, determine the existence of languages, cause depopulation and poverty in one area and prosperity in another. Governments often manipulate ethnic groups in their pursuits of political aims calling for national unity which, in turn, maintains ethnic disparity by causing open conflicts. It seems obvious that the problem of ethnicity demands the multi-disciplinary cooperation of the social sciences.

In the following, I will limit myself to the discussion of the folkloristic approach to ethnic groups in modern European nations. To be exact, by folkloristic approach I mean the study of the culture of peoples in ethnic context as it is conceived by European ethnologists who study intellectual, social, and material aspects of culture in conjunction with one another no matter what the accepted terminology of national or regional schools.

In the course of the last fifteen to twenty years American folklorists began to explore regional, ethnic and immigrant cultural units and made them an important field of research. Only after several collecting expeditions, has it become clear that past-orientation and item-concentration has to be given up to open the way for a more-timely focus on the immigrant process of adjustment and assimilation from immigrant to ethnic,<sup>8</sup> as well as on the sociocultural consequences of integration on both ethnic and dominant values.

The folkloristic problem of ethnicity in America differs considerably from that in Europe. While successive arrivals belonged to a great many ethnic groups (far more than those coexisting in single modern European nations), almost none were strong enough to establish lasting ethnic communities that could create their cohesive and specific cultural values. The two-step acculturative process in a very short period of time (two generations, in the main) dissolved the ethnic enclaves. In its first phase, external adjustment

had to be made in order to make a living and to compete in the new society. This consisted primarily of language learning and of the change of everyday habits. Then, in the second phase, identification with the majority of the population arose naturally as a nonmaterial substratum of life, as an expression of adherence to the new country.

Immigrants, as a rule, establish their ethnic communities only temporarily and later maintain their organizational framework symbolically, so that ethnic behavior remains rather marginal in the behavioral system of integrated Americans. This can be easily explained by the fact that during the two successive processes the old-country patterns are washed away by the overpowering new experience in the adopted new country. The immigrant does not bring along a perfect copy of the old-country culture, but only some traits of it. He can bring along only what he has. His social heritage is but a random fragment of the local variation of the culture of his class, and it excludes many important aspects of the old-country culture. The peasant immigrant brought over what was the living culture of his home village, and he had rather poor information about other parts of his national culture. Entering ethnic compounds he got reassurance only from a few members of his immediate homeland and had to adjust his inherited values to the rather vague pattern of his national culture.<sup>10</sup> The newness of this whole ethnic process is maybe more apparent in Canada where a bilingual, multicultural society was officially recognized and where time between mass migration and consolidation was so brief--the immigrant generation still dominates--that a "Canadian" identity for the total population has not yet been established, according to A. Richmond's report.<sup>11</sup> The American folklorist, therefore, has to study this relatively short process in addition to the more crucial question: what is the part the consciously-or unconsciously-maintained and newly-created pseudoethnic features play in general American folklife? Roger Abrahams at the Folklore in the Modern World Conference<sup>12</sup> reminded us of the need of a folkloristic method to study ethnicity in the culturally-pluralistic United States, to complement the research of other social sciences, in an age when there is a growing desire for ethnic recognition by conscious exhibition of distinctive ethnic traits for a national audience.

No matter how politically explosive situations can cause the reinforcement of ethnic consciousness in European countries, there is a basic difference that makes folklorists approach ethnic cultures with different methods than those employed on the American scene. Ethnics are the result of an uninterrupted, slow and natural process of many centuries, even millennia, during which they acquired sets of specific cultural features by which their ethnic identification can easily be made. Ethnic groups are vital and viable composite parts of national cultures that, even though they might be oppressed, relocated, transplanted and dispersed, their strong historic ties and their profound roots keep them alive. They might adapt themselves to different multiethnic situations; they might settle as cultural islands enclosed by the body of an alien nation; they do not disappear without a trace. Although ethnics might grow senescent, dissolve, and even get absorbed by a stronger ethnic, such a process follows slowly and almost unnoticeably, and effects mostly the marginal population, not the cores of ethnic territories. In other words, ethnic groups are to be conceived as historical formations as part of the cultural

continuity so prevalent in Europe. Contemporary patterns of ethnic enclaves cannot be understood without their prehistory. Walter Goldschmidt,<sup>13</sup> an American anthropologist, commented on his travel in Europe in 1958 that:

Continental Europe is so generously sprinkled with reminders of cultural continuity...that it is more the wonder that sociological orientations are increasingly prevalent than the historical viewpoints should continue to flourish. These reminders are not merely the temples of war, religion and faded vainglory, but are also found in social institutions and antique customs that link the present age of atomic power to the distant past of Mediterranean civilization and pagan Europe. It is a contrast to America, where the temples represent a civilization completely foreign or are of recent date....

Goldschmidt concludes that "one can only explain culture in historical terms."

Like Soviet students of ethnogenesis, most European ethnologists traditionally consider their discipline historically oriented. The concept of "ethos" or "ethnic group" as an entity for scholarly scrutiny was conceived by its most outstanding proponents, the emigrant Russian, Shirokogorov,<sup>14</sup> and the German, Wilhelm Mühlmann,<sup>15</sup> as a continually changing product of historic conditions: "An ethnic group should be identified by shared and relatively stabilized cultural traits and by a real or assumed common origin." The members of an ethnic community can be distinguished from similar groups by external physical features on the one hand, and by cultural traits like language, customs, skills, and artifacts, on the other. These traits should be commonly shared by the membership and should comprise the essentials of in-group relationship. In broader terms, other scholars deduce the ethnic identifiers of a group from the sum of ethnographic field data. More recently, the Norwegian Fredrik Barth summarized the term "ethnic group" as a population "which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction, has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order."<sup>16</sup> These specifications allow the scholar studying ethnic cultures the freedom to develop a wide area of inquiry. Although historically and topographically delimited, ethnic groups might be conceived as very diverse entities in terms of the sizes of their populations, systems of organization, statuses and relationships. In Europe they are generally known in two main formats: 1) as regional dialect components of a general national culture, and 2) as alien minority groups, language islands or colonies within the nations.

In the first case, ethnologists investigate historical, geographical, ecological and demographical facts in addition to ethnographic field data, to account for the specific combination of cultural elements that characterize the group's ethnicity. Among the important factors, past waves of population mobility play an important role. Ethnicities develop often by the merger and layering of other regional ethnic variables as well as alien ethnic elements, and they are often also affected by their interethnic environment. It is often

hard to determine the boundaries of the groups because, as already indicated, towards their borders outstanding features tend gradually to be washed away. In regional ethnic group studies, researchers paid much attention to the so-called "ethnic specifics," that is, the local versions of the national stereotypes of the practical and expressive culture. They have found that the distinctive features of an ethnic cannot be described by one outstanding trait but rather by the specific combination and uses of several traits. It was argued that the elicitation of the specific ethnic character of the regional groups can result in the discernment of the national character of a people.<sup>17</sup>

In the second case, although alien ethnic colonies within the nations are investigated in much the same way as regional ethnics, the goal of the study is largely different. National ethnographers are interested in the diverse kinds of language colonies outside of the mother culture because of the complex cultural stratification. Detached language colonies combine autochthonous elements from the time of separation with the adapted elements of the dominant culture as well as from borrowing from the coexistent other alien ethnics on the same footing. The retroaction of the inherited and the borrowed create a new version of the national culture model.<sup>18</sup>

Processes of change by the crossing of ethnics and change of ethnic values became the target of research, especially after the Second World War, when, as a consequence of the war events, ethnic group relocation and exchange of minority populations between nations set minority groups into motion and stirred up internal migrations as well.<sup>19</sup> There has not been migration of this magnitude since the late eighteenth century when groups of needy agriculturalists of different national origins were settled in the depopulated fertile regions of Eastern and Central Europe, freed from Turkish occupation. Relocated ethnics offered a unique occasion to observe acculturative processes almost in a laboratory situation: the normally slow change that took centuries in earlier epochs were accelerated by the forced resettlements and yielded new data in ethnic stratification.<sup>20</sup>

The study of interethnic relations evolved as a special field in recent years. Currently, teams of fieldworkers visit communities (villages, cities or areas) in which two or more nationalities coexist, interact and overlap within a country or in the ethnically mixed border zone of two countries. Techniques of approach have been developed in the preeminently multiethnic regions of Southeastern Europe. Several model studies are already published, and more are yet to come.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most interesting new contributions to this field of knowledge is the community study performed by the group of the "Marburger Studienkreis für Europäische Ethnologie," under the leadership of Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, and with the cooperation of Romanian ethnologists.<sup>22</sup> A multilingual village was selected by the researchers whose aim was to examine interethnic relations in the process of sociocultural change as it takes place in the present in an ethnically mixed village of the Romanian Banat. The small community of their choice acquired its German majority in the early eighteenth century but included also Serbian, Romanian, Gypsy, and Hungarian populations. By the time of the study, 1970-71, different historical and political events changed pop-

ulation figures and reduced the German group to half of the Romanian. However, the lasting coexistence of the three main ethnics--Romanian, German, and Serbian--with their distinctive religious affiliations, made it possible to register empirically the change that took place within the lifetime of three current generations. The members of the research group focused their investigation around the themes labor in the village, leisure, family life, schooling and education, and the observance of a calendar custom in the three ethnic groups. As a theoretical point of departure for the study, it was postulated that:

through the lasting encounter of ethnically distinct social patterns, processes of change of different intensity and speed will be kept in motion both in their structure and cultural manifestations. Consequently, despite their characteristic organization, ethnic groups cannot be described according to a set of traits because trait-combinations will always change according to the relevant socioeconomic context based on the given regional-historical situation.<sup>23</sup>

The authors emphasize that all ethnics are to be conceived as human groups whose lives together and ensuing cultural expressions are in permanent change. The ethnic group is an open system of social interactions and strings of cultural traditions manifested in dynamic processes of growth and decay, always on the move.<sup>24</sup> The objective of the researcher should be to recognize and describe the motivation and the mechanism that causes the change in the ethnic pattern.

In view of these perspectives in the study of interethnic contacts within multi-ethnic communities, the interchange of ethnic elements and their spatial and temporal spread, the examination of ethnic boundaries can become one of the most fruitful fields of our discipline.

#### NOTES

1. Yu. V. Bromley and O. Shkaratan, "The General and the Particular in Historical, Ethnographical and Sociological Research," Current Anthropology 13 (1972): 569-574.
2. Yu. V. Bromley, "On Typologizing Ethnic Communities," (paper written for the Ninth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Chicago, 1973).
3. S.P. Tolstov, "Sovietskaya škola v etnografii," Sovietskaya etnografiya, 1947, no. 4: 8-28.
4. I. Stalin, Marxism i nacionalno-kolonialny vopros (Moscow, 1934).
5. S.A. Tokarev, "K postanovke problem etnogeneza" [The problem of ethnogenesis], Sovietskaya etnografiya, 1949, no. 3: 12-36.

6. P.I. Kushner (Knyshev), "K metodologii opre delnya etnograficheskikh territoriy" [To the methodology of determination of ethnic territories], Sovietskaya etnografiya, 1946, no. 1: 12-14; Idem., "Metody kartografirovaniya nacionalnovo sostava naseleniya" [Methods of mapping the ethnic combination of the population], Sovietskaya etnografiya, 1950, no. 4: 24-54.
7. Tamotsou Shibutani and Kian M. Kwan, Ethnic Stratification. A Comparative Approach (New York: MacMillan, 1965).
8. This process has been outlined for the first time by Robert B. Klymasz in "Ukrainian Folklore in Canada: An Immigrant Complex in Transition" (Ph.D dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1970), p. 324.
9. Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life. The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Otto Feinstein, ed., Ethnic Groups in the City. Culture, Institutions and Power (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1971).
10. John Kosa, Land of Choice. The Hungarians in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 91-94.
11. Anthony H. Richmond, "Language, Ethnicity and the Problem of Identity in a Canadian Metropolis," (paper presented at the Ninth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Chicago, 1973).
12. Roger D. Abrahams, "Folklore and Cultural Pluralism," (paper presented at the Folklore in the Modern World Conference, Bloomington, Indiana, 1973).
13. "From the Editor's Desk," American Anthropologist 60 (1958): 6.
14. Sergei M. Shirokogorov, Ethnological and Linguistical Aspects of the Uralic-Altaic Hypothesis (Peiping, China: The Commercial Press, 1931).
15. Wilhelm E. Mühlmann, "Ethnologie als soziologische Theorie der inter-ethnischen Systeme," Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 8 (1956): 186-205.
16. Fredrik Barth, ed., Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), pp. 10-11.
17. László Vajda, "A néprajzi anyaggyűjtés módszere és jelentősége" [The method and importance of ethnographic data-collecting], Ethnographia 65 (1954): 1-19. The author sees ethnic specificities as the ultimate goal of ethnographic research. His conclusions were criticized by two commentators, Tibor Bodrogi (pp. 581-592) and Lajos Vargyas (pp. 240-244).
18. Although between the two World Wars folklorists of several nations visited small ethnic islands detached from their mother culture, the most prominent and systematic study was oriented towards the German colonies of Eastern Europe. Irrespective of nationalistic-political goals, the main drawbacks of these studies were that they completely disregarded the impact of the

host culture and saw in the group a petrified relic of a glorious German past. See a critical review of the problem in Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, "Zur Frage der interethnischen Beziehungen in der 'Sprachinselvolkskunde'," Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 62 (1959): 19-47.

19. Gyula Ortutay, "Recent Internal Migration in Hungary and Ethnographical Research," in Hungarian Folklore (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972), pp. 109-131.
20. The team research conducted in the settlements of the relocated Bucovina Szeklers in West Hungary started in 1948 and is still in continuation. Among the several studies is my Folktales and Society (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1969). One of the most impressive areas of German Volkskunde opened up when the former settlers of the Eastern European colonies fled or were expelled from their homeland of some two hundred years, after World War II. The relocation and ensuing process of readjustment is the topic of the different studies published in the Jahrbuch für Ostdeutsche Volkskunde (from 1954 on) by a special Kommission für Ostdeutsche Volkskunde, and in a related book series. Among some of the prominent studies are the following: Josef Hanika, Volkskundliche Wandlungen durch Heimatverlust und Zwangswanderung (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1957); Herbert Schwedt, Kulturstile kleiner Gemeinden (Tübingen: 1968); Hermann Bausinger, Markus Braun, and Herbert Schwedt, Neue Siedlungen (Stuttgart, 1963); Ina-Maria Greverus, Der territoriale Mensch (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1972).
21. In the course of the last twelve years a group of Czech scholars investigated the folklore, culture, and language conditions of a Czech minority group in the Romanian Banat in the context of history and interethnic contacts: Vladimír Scheufler, Olga Skalníková, et al., "Kultura rumunských Čechů" Cesky lid 49 (1962): 145-209. Currently Hungarian and Slovak fieldworkers are studying a Slovak village in Hungary and a Hungarian village in Slovakia; similar cooperatives are in progress in the ethnically mixed border zone between Yugoslavia and Hungary.
22. Annemie Schenk and Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, Interethnik und sozialer Wandel in einem mehrsprachigen Dorf des rumänischen Banats (Marburg, 1973).
23. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
24. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, "Probleme interethnischer Forschungen in Südost-Europa," Ethnologia Europaea 1 (1967): 218-231.